CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   1.   An image management system, comprising:

2.   an image acquisition device;

3.   a computer coupled to the image acquisition device, the computer including

4.   logic for receiving a diagnostic image from the image acquisition device; and

5.   a memory element associated with the computer, where the memory element

6.   stores a plurality of electronic signature files;

7.   wherein the computer includes logic for associating one of the plurality of

8.   electronic signature files with the diagnostic image.

1.   2.   The image management system of claim 1, wherein each of the plurality

2.   of electronic signature files corresponds to a signature of a user of the image

3.   management system.

1.   3.   The image management system of claim 2, further comprising a client

2.   application associated with the computer, where the client application instructs the

3.   computer to associate one of the plurality of electronic signature files with the

4.   diagnostic image.

1   4.   The image management system of claim 3, wherein the client

2 application further comprises:

3   a user interface configured to present to the user of the image management

4 system a plurality of choices from which the user identifies him or herself as the user of

5 the image management system so that the electronic signature file associated with the

6 diagnostic image corresponds to the user of the image management system.

1   5.   The image management system of claim 4, where the image acquisition

2 device is an ultrasound diagnostic device.

1   6.   The image management system of claim 5, where the electronic

2 signature file is associated with the diagnostic image only after the entry of a password.

1   7.   The image management system of claim 1, further comprising:

2   a network configured to couple the image acquisition device to the computer;

3 and

4   a network interface associated with the image acquisition device and the

5 computer, the network interface configured to electronically transfer the diagnostic

6 image over the network.

8.   A method for applying an electronic signature to a report associated with an image file, the method comprising the steps of:

acquiring a diagnostic image using an image acquisition device;

forwarding the diagnostic image to a computer;

storing a plurality of electronic signature files in a memory associated with a computer; and

associating one of the plurality of electronic signature files with the diagnostic image.

9.   The method of claim 8, wherein each of the plurality of electronic signature files corresponds to a signature of a user of the computer.

10.   The method of claim 9, further comprising the step of using a client application to instruct the computer to associate one of the plurality of electronic signature files with the diagnostic image.

11.   The method of claim 10, further comprising the step of presenting to a user of the image management system a plurality of choices from which the user identifies him or herself as the user of the image management system so that the electronic signature file associated with the diagnostic image corresponds to the user of the image management system.

12.   The method of claim 11, where the image acquisition device is an ultrasound diagnostic device.

1   13.   The method of claim 12, further comprising the step of requiring a

2   password prior to associating one of the plurality of electronic signature files with the

3   diagnostic image.

1   14.   The method of claim 8, further comprising the steps of:

2   coupling the image acquisition device to the computer system over a network;

3   and

4   electronically transferring the diagnostic image over the network.

1   15.   A computer readable medium having a program for applying an

2   electronic signature to a report associated with an image file, the program comprising

3   logic for performing the steps of:

4   receiving a diagnostic image from an image acquisition device;

5   forwarding the diagnostic image to a computer system;

6   storing a plurality of electronic signature files in a memory associated with a

7   computer; and

8   associating one of the plurality of electronic signature files with the diagnostic

9   image.

1   16.   The program of claim 15, wherein each of the plurality of electronic

2   signature files corresponds to a signature of a user of the image management system.

1   17.   The program of claim 16, further comprising logic for allowing a client

2   application to instruct the computer to associate one of the plurality of electronic

3   signature files with the diagnostic image.

1   18.   The program of claim 17, further comprising logic for presenting to a

2   user of the image management system a plurality of choices from which the user

3   identifies him or herself as the user of the image management system so that the

4   electronic signature file associated with the diagnostic image corresponds to the user

5   of the image management system.

1   19.   The program of claim 18, where the image acquisition device is an

2   ultrasound diagnostic device.

1   20.   The program of claim 19, further comprising logic for requiring a

2   password prior to associating one of the plurality of electronic signature files with the

3   diagnostic image.

1   21.   The program of claim 15, further comprising logic for:

2   coupling the image acquisition device to the computer system over a network;

3   and

4   electronically transferring the diagnostic image over the network.